



Spring 2010

The Covenant Connection

A Newsletter of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (Vol 13, #1)

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Covenant Network's Website Has A New Look and A New URL!

Check out our newly renovated website – www.covnetpres.org. It has the same great information as before, but now everything is much easier to find. And – there's a greater opportunity for you to share your news and ideas.

Have you had the opportunity to read about Riviera Presbyterian Church in Miami, FL, or the Faithful Friends in the Presbytery of West Virginia on the Covenant Network website? Thanks to Karen Turney, we will be featuring Covenant Congregations and presbytery chapters or support groups on a regular basis on our new site. And Karen has her work cut out for her! Check out the webpage that lists the CovNet chapters throughout the country, as well as the page showing the congregations that have signed the Call to Covenant Community.

We also plan to highlight Covenant Congregations that are "in the news." If you would like to share some of the wonderful things your congregation is doing, please contact Lou East (loueast@covenantnetwork.org).

Be Part of the Covenant Network Presence at General Assembly in July

Join us in Minneapolis for the church's biennial gathering. On-line registration and ticket sales for General Assembly are now open at www.pcusa.org/ga219/.

Plan to attend our Commissioners' Convocation Dinner on Friday, July 2, at Westminster Presbyterian Church, with Doug Nave, attorney and Covenant Network Director, as our featured speaker. Gus Niebuhr, former *New York Times* religion editor and the author of *Beyond Tolerance: Searching for Interfaith Understanding in America*, will keynote the luncheon on Monday, July 5, challenging us to move beyond mere toleration of differences to mutual respect and understanding.

A wonderful way to support the Commissioners from your Presbytery is by purchasing tickets to these two events for them! Contact Lou East (loueast@covenantnetwork.org) for more information.

John Knox Presbytery Approves Scott Anderson for Ordination

John Knox Presbytery voted overwhelmingly in February to approve the ordination of Scott Anderson, a partnered gay man, as Minister of Word and Sacrament. Mr. Anderson presented an Affirmation of Conscience stating his belief that G-6.0106b "represents a grievous misapplication of biblical teaching." Considering this statement along with his Faith Statement and its knowledge of his life and service to the church, the Presbytery found his scruple not to be "essential." Read more on page 5.

Plan Now To Attend the 2010 Covenant Conference: "We Are Family"

November 4-6, 2010 – Circle these dates on your calendar and plan to join us at St. Philip Presbyterian Church in Houston, TX, for the 2010 Covenant Conference, "We Are Family: Celebrating the Whole Household of God." Come for powerful worship, challenging speakers and preachers, and nurturing fellowship with your Covenant Network branch of the family. Leaders include Dr. Margaret Aymer Oget, Professor of New Testament at ITC in Atlanta and a member of the Special Committee on Marriage; Rev. David Van Dyke, Pastor of House of Hope church in St. Paul, MN and CovNet Co-Moderator; and Rev. Katie Morrison, an out lesbian ordained in the PC(USA) but now a minister in the UCC. Stay tuned for more exciting details!

The church we seek to strengthen is built upon the hospitality of Jesus, who said, "Whoever comes to me I will not cast out." The good news of the gospel is that all—those who are near and those who were far off—are invited; all are members of the household and citizens of the realm of God. No one has a claim on this invitation and none of us becomes worthy, even by sincere effort, to live according to God's will. Grateful for our own inclusion, we carry out the mission of the church to extend God's hospitality to a broken and fearful and lonely world. From the *Call to Covenant Community*. Please read it in its entirety at covenantnetwork.org/c2cc06.htm.

Celebrating Diversity in the Church

Clifton Kirkpatrick

*From The Presbyterian Leader,
March 3, 2010*

The Church as the Body of Christ

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), at its best, has modeled its life and ministry on the biblical image of the body of Christ. The very first paragraph of our Book of Order captures this ethos when it states, “God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body” (G-1.0100). Everything about the church—its faith, its polity, its worship, its mission in the world—seeks to be a faithful reflection of the body of Christ.

This image was central to the New Testament’s understanding of the church. It was developed best by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. To a deeply troubled and divided church in Corinth, the apostle wrote these words:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit . . . If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Cor. 12:12–13, 26–27)

A Diverse Body

One of the great realities of the New Testament church was that it was diverse beyond anyone’s wildest imagination. This diversity often led to deep conflicts in the life of the church, as was obviously true in Corinth. The old models of what it meant to be a religious community would no longer hold. That is why this image of the church as the body of Christ was such a breath of fresh air.

Paul viewed diversity, at its core, not as a problem but as a tremendous gift. Just like in a body, where it functions so much better because it has eyes and ears, nose and throat, arms and legs,

so the church can be much stronger because each of the God-given gifts of diverse people can be shared together to build up the church and strengthen its ministry. Just like in a body, when it is working well, these different parts do not exist to compete with one another but to compliment one another to make the body stronger and more effective.

This vision was not just that of an organic, cooperative human community, but also of the shape of the continuing ministry of Christ in the world. The head of this body is Jesus Christ. According to our Book of Order, “Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission to the world, for its building up, and for its service to God . . . Christ gives to his Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its officers and ordinances” (G-1.0100 b & c). Each member of the body of Christ is given a “manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). All members of the body together work to incarnate the love of Christ for each other and for the world.

Core Values

It is this understanding of the church as the body of Christ that has led the Reformed tradition and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to develop some of its core values:

◆ The Lordship of Christ—Everything that we do is centered on Jesus Christ, who is our Lord and Savior and the Head of the Church.

◆ Honoring Diversity—Just as the body celebrates its diversity, we celebrate, affirm, and welcome the rich diversity of all of God’s people in our common life.

◆ Shared Leadership—There can be no authoritarian leadership in a Presbyterian church, because all parts of the body have gifts that must be honored in its leadership. That is the basis of the Reformed conviction that the spiritual leaders (deacons, elders, and ministers) are to be elected by the people of God.

◆ Being One Church—Just as there is only one body of Christ, there is only one church. Each of our congregations is an organic part of the broader Presbyterian Church, and the Presbyterian Church is just one part of the church ecumenical. To be Presbyterian is to be ecumenical!

◆ A Holistic Ministry—Our mission and ministry in the world is the ministry of Christ. Just as Christ was called “to bring good news to the poor . . . to proclaim release to the captives. . . and to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18), so are we.

Paul viewed diversity, at its core, not as a problem but as a tremendous gift . . . The church can be much stronger because each of the God-given gifts of diverse people can be shared together to build up the church and strengthen its ministry.

Provocative Words from the 2009 Covenant Conference



Clifton Kirkpatrick

◆ Discerning the Mind of Christ—The purpose of our governance, which on the surface has many parallels to U.S. political institutions, is not to balance political interests in the church, but to enable elected spiritual leaders (ministers and elders), together in prayer, dialogue, and reflection on God’s Word, to best discern the mind of Christ for the church and the world.

These are the implications that Presbyterian and Reformed people have gleaned from the biblical call of the church to be the body of Christ; and when they are lived out, they are a real gift.

In many ways our culture is pulling our churches away from these values. In a time when there is a consumer mentality about religion, when individual megachurches not organically connected to anyone rise in popularity, and when interest groups seek to shape the church’s life, this vision of the church as the body of Christ can seem very countercultural. That was also true for the New Testament church. However, that church, like our own, found that when the church centered itself on its understanding of being the body of Christ and of living in accord with the principles of such a body, God richly blessed the church—and, through the ministry of the church, the world. Let us live with confidence that the same will be true in our time!

Clifton Kirkpatrick is Visiting Professor of Ecumenical Studies and Global Ministries at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Stated Clerk Emeritus of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly, and President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

This essay was originally published by www.ThePresbyterianLeader.com (<http://www.thepresbyterianleader.com/>). Used with permission.

Powerful and fresh discourses challenged our vision of “The Church We Can See From Here” at the 2009 Conference in Cleveland, Ohio. The full texts can be found on the new CovNet website at www.covnetpres.org/conferences/most-recent-conference/. And all are also available on CD or audio cassette at \$10 each, from the Covenant Network office or the e-store. Videos of the plenary addresses and worship services are available on the website as well.

Here are several excerpts, to whet your appetite:

From **Mark Achtemeier**, University of Dubuque Seminary:

“There is a destructive myth circulating in both the right and left wings of the church, which says that if you’re really serious about biblical authority you will of course embrace a traditionalist point of view in this issue, whereas a more progressive stance requires you to hold onto the scriptures more loosely. Well I don’t believe it, and neither should you! It is time to put these misleading stereotypes to rest.”

From **Kenda Dean**, Princeton Theological Seminary:

“God has called us and given us the gift and the power of the Holy Spirit to go in and imagine the world, as it should be, to live into it as it should be, the way God created it, to treat people as though they’re the people God made them to be instead of the people they’ve become.”

From **Eddie Glaude**, Princeton University:

“You can’t be a Constantinian Christian and bear witness to this message. You can’t be obsessed with walking the corridors of power and bear witness to this message. When Jesus read the scroll of Isaiah, he declared that we, if we hear him, must work prophetically to transform this world. This is not milque-toast liberal Protestantism here.”

From **Dawne Moon**, Marquette University:

“When opponents convene to make policy decisions without the transformation of consciousness that comes from relating to each other, the interaction can feel like a war between people from completely different planets. Dialogue can give participants the opportunity to humanize each other, to see each other as members of the same moral community.”

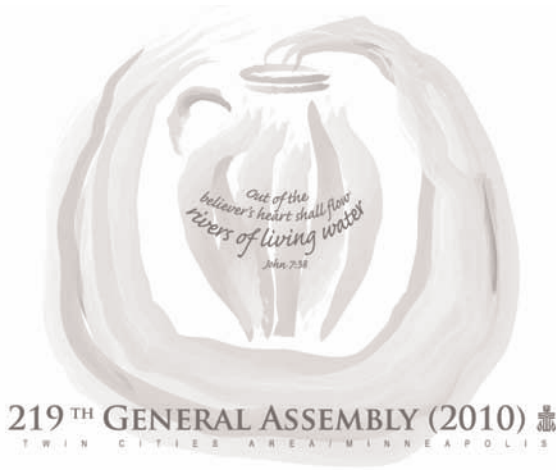
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219th General Assembly

July 3-10, 2010



The church will gather in General Assembly July 3-10 in Minneapolis. It will consider numerous issues of significance for the PC(USA) and the world, including ordination, marriage, social justice, peacemaking in the Middle East and elsewhere, additions to the Book of Confessions, the proposed new Form of Government, and much more. You can follow business as it arrives in Louisville at www.pc-biz.org.

At the conclusion of the 218th General Assembly (2008), the Covenant Network rejoiced that the G.A. had acted positively on each of the goals articulated by the Board:

- ◆ *Approve the overtures designed to support the 217th G.A.'s approval of the authoritative interpretation of G-6.0108.*
- ◆ *Issue an Authoritative Interpretation making it clear that the "definitive guidance" statements that preceded G-6.0106b, and the subsequent affirmations of them, have no force or effect, and*
- ◆ *Send to the presbyteries an amendment of G-6.0106b that would remove the provisions aimed at excluding LGBT persons from ordained service.*
- ◆ *Approve overtures that would strengthen the Presbyterian commitment to pastoral care and to equal civil rights for families of same-gender partners, and establish a study committee to explore the theology and practice of marriage and related matters.*
- ◆ *Initiate the process of replacing the inaccurate translation of the Heidelberg Catechism currently in our Book of Confessions with a translation faithful to the original languages.*

As always, Covenant Network will be present to support commissioners and advisory delegates with a vision of a just and generous church. If you'll be in Minneapolis, National Organizer Tricia Dykers Koenig can connect you to dozens of volunteer opportunities, from a few hours to all week. Contact her at 216-658-1770 or triciadk@covenantnetwork.org. For one person's reflection on the experience, see the next page.

Each of these matters will be back on the agenda of the 219th G.A. when it meets in Minneapolis in July.

◆ *The 218th G.A. reaffirmed the intent of the 217th G.A. in approving the Authoritative Interpretation (AI) of G-6.0108 proposed by the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church; and removed the AIs formerly known as "definitive guidance." Fifteen presbyteries have submitted overtures seeking to reverse one or both of the 218th G.A.'s AIs related to ordination standards.*

◆ *The 218th G.A. sent Amendment 08-B, to amend G-6.0106b, to the presbyteries. While the support for welcoming the ministry of LGBT servants of the church was greater than ever, Amendment 08-B fell short of the needed presbytery majority. Twenty-one overtures again propose amending G-6.0106b to remove the current discriminatory language; there will be eleven different options for the G.A. to consider, including wording very similar to 08-B, deleting the paragraph entirely, and several others. One presbytery seeks to amend the paragraph to be even less welcoming, and two ask for a moratorium until 2012.*

◆ *The 218th G.A. mandated a Special Committee to Study Issues of Civil Union and Christian Marriage. A very diverse committee approved a moderate report, acknowledging that Bible-believing Presbyterians disagree in good faith and providing helpful background for the PC(USA)'s continued discernment on marriage; but a minority has submitted a report that nevertheless insists on imposing their view on all. There are three overtures that would share the position of the special committee minority. Eight overtures propose changes in the description of marriage in the *Book of Order* that would remove gender specificity, while five seek Authoritative Interpretation to make clear that those authorized to perform same-gender marriages that are legal in their areas may exercise discretion in extending that critical form of pastoral care.*

◆ *The 218th G.A. recognized that the translation of the Heidelberg Catechism currently in our Book of Confessions is inaccurate in several respects, and began the process of correcting the problem. The special committee appointed to pursue the corrections is unanimously recommending that it be reconstituted for another two years, in order to continue conversations with two of our Reformed partner denominations about a joint translation.*

The 219th G.A. will have these and other opportunities to build upon the faithful work of the 218th and previous General Assemblies.

Helping Commissioners Be Effective

Chris East

My first experience as a G.A. Commissioner was to the 203rd General Assembly in Baltimore, which turned out to be quite a bit more exciting than I had expected. During the debate over the controversial 1991 paper entitled “Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice,” I made a motion and offered a comment on the General Assembly floor that was intended to be conciliatory in nature. My comments were picked up and quoted out of context by the Associated Press, causing a ‘stir’ back in my southern presbytery. What surprised me at the assembly was just how well prepared some people were to jump into the national trenches, while others of us were quite green to this very intense process – definitely not the positive ‘green’ of today’s vernacular!

A particular memory from Baltimore was catching up with an old college friend, Tricia Dykers Koenig, and our commiserating about the need to become more informed of the issues, more deliberate in our actions, and more connected on the national level to those who were our natural collaborators.

During the last two meetings of the General Assembly, in Birmingham and San Jose, I have been reunited with my old college friend Tricia, now Covenant Network’s National Organizer, volunteering on her team as a Committee Liaison. Committee Liaisons work in pairs to resource every committee of the G.A.; supporting commissioners in their committee work and helping them to participate effectively during the plenary sessions.

I am convinced that when we do our job well, we are helping the commissioners to understand and navigate the process and guard against the natural exhaustion of G.A., so that weaker decisions are not made during the waning hours of a packed schedule. As General Assembly has grown in complexity over the past two decades, it has become increasingly clear that serving our commissioners is more important today than ever before. I look forward

to being in Minneapolis and hope to see many of you, old friends and new, there. There is good work to do.

Chris East is co-pastor of Epiphany Presbyterian New Church Development, and a pastoral counselor with Replacements, Ltd., in Greensboro, NC.



Scott Anderson Approved for Ordination, with a “Departure”

John Knox Presbytery on February 20 examined and approved the ordination of Scott Anderson, a partnered gay man who is currently serving as Executive Director of the Wisconsin Council of Churches. In his examination, Mr. Anderson declared his conscientious objection to an exclusionary interpretation of G-6.0106b that would preclude ordained service by persons in same-sex relationships. The presbytery considered his scruple in light of our historic Presbyterian polity, affirmed by the 2006 and 2008 General Assemblies, that we are to show each other mutual forbearance in matters of conscientious disagreement that the examining body determines, given everything it knows about a particular candidate, are not “essential.”

Members of the presbytery have worked since 2006 to develop community, mutual trust, careful discernment, and open process, following the recommendations of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity & Purity of the Church. Mr. Anderson was the only openly gay member of that Task Force. The presbytery’s final vote, approving Mr. Anderson’s ordination, was 81-25.

One session and five individual complainants have filed a remedial case, challenging the presbytery’s approval of Mr. Anderson’s ordination, with the Synod PJC. A stay of ordination has been sought. Covenant Network director Doug Nave is representing the presbytery as legal counsel.

This is the second time Mr. Anderson’s process has been subject to judicial review. The same session challenged the presbytery’s enrollment of Mr. Anderson as a candidate in November 2008. The Synod PJC dismissed that case, holding that presbyteries have discretion in determining whether to advance persons to candidacy, and that final examination of eligibility for ordination (not enrollment as an inquirer or candidate) is the proper time for a presbytery to apply G-6.0106b. Complainants appealed that decision to the GAPJC, but then agreed to dismissal of the appeal in light of the GAPJC’s ruling in the similar case, *Naegeli v. Presbytery of San Francisco* (2009).

Along with his Faith Statement, Mr. Anderson presented an Affirmation of Conscience saying in part, “I affirm the authority of Scripture and our obligation as Christians to follow its teaching in all aspects of our lives, including our sexuality. I believe that all Christians are called to lives of holiness and faithfulness that glorify God. . . . But I also believe that the categorical prohibition contained in G-6.0106b represents a grievous misapplication of biblical teaching [that] is unfaithful to God’s loving intentions for humankind, and seriously undermines the church’s gospel witness to gay and lesbian persons.” The full Affirmation is posted on our new website, www.covnetpres.org.

What Do Presbyterians Say About Marriage?

David H. Jensen

Reprinted from the book,
*Frequently Asked Questions About
Sexuality, the Bible, & the Church:
Plain Talk About Tough Issues*,
edited by Ted A. Smith



As Presbyterians—including General Assembly commissioners—prepare to receive and discuss the Report of the Special Committee to Study Issues of Civil Union and Christian Marriage, we are pleased to share these observations on the Reformed theological understanding of marriage, from our book, *Frequently Asked Questions about Sexuality, the Bible, & the Church*. Copies of the book are available through our website at \$5 (\$3 each for ten or more).

Biblical Foundations

For Presbyterians the primary resource for understanding marriage is Scripture. The creation story implies one purpose of marriage, companionship: “it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as a partner” (Gen. 2:18). This purpose is connected, though not synonymous, with the earlier injunction for humanity to be fruitful and multiply. The subsequent forms of marriage recorded in the Old Testament are surprisingly wide. Many OT writers, for example, assume polygamy as part of God’s blessing for humanity. Some marriages occur as the result of morally reprehensible actions, such as abduction (Judg 21). And, in the longest sustained passage of human relationship in Scripture, the Song of Solomon celebrates the sexual love between a man and a woman without referring to marriage directly. These varied depictions suggest that God’s blessing is not confined to particular forms of marriage, but extends across culture and redeems fallen relationships whenever persons live in faithfulness to God’s covenant together. As God redeems humanity, no one cultural form of marriage emerges as normative for all others.

The New Testament specifically blesses singleness and marriage, at times favoring the former. Jesus’ own singleness does not come at the expense of binding personal relationships, but intensifies them as they are directed to God’s Reign. Paul prefers singleness to marriage in much of his writing because God’s Reign is imminent: “So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better” (1 Cor. 7:38). Jesus’ sayings against divorce are stronger than anything found in the Old Testament (Mk. 10:11-12), indicating that the bonds of marriage endure throughout time. Yet

Jesus also claims that the demands of the gospel may pit family members against one another (Mt. 10:35-7). However strong the covenant of marriage is between partners, the covenant between God and humanity initiated in Jesus Christ is primary and may cause ruptures in the former. In the NT, the promises of marriage are always provisional in comparison to the promise of God’s Reign.

Reformed Confessional and Theological Heritage

Reformed theology serves as aid in interpreting the primary witness of Scripture, yet an overarching theology of Christian marriage does not exist in our tradition. Calvin and the Reformers rejected the notion of a *sacrament* of marriage, because it is not a “visible word” by which God expresses the promises of grace and communion in and through Jesus Christ. They preferred to call marriage an *ordinance* instituted by God, profitable for God’s people (Second Helvetic, 5.171). One way of approaching a Reformed theology of marriage is to claim that its traditions understand marriage as both a *sign* of grace and a *response* to grace already given. Marriage represents a journey shared by two persons, in covenant before God and the community of faith, pledged over a lifetime. In this sense, a married couple, in the Reformed tradition, is always *on the way* to Christian marriage.

John Calvin devotes surprisingly few words to marriage in his *Institutes*. He married somewhat late in life, and wrote comparatively little – and then only reservedly – about his own marriage and family life. Calvin celebrates marriage as a blessing for human happiness and as an antidote to sin: “Man has been created in this condition that he may not lead a solitary life, but may enjoy a helper joined to

himself...Therefore, the Lord sufficiently provided for us in this matter when he established marriage, the fellowship of which, begun on his authority, he also sanctified by his blessing...The companionship of marriage has been ordained as a necessary remedy to keep us from plunging into unbridled lust” (*Institutes* 2.8.41). For Calvin, the *restraint* of marriage is also a joy.

Following Calvin, the Westminster Confession of Faith contains a clear endorsement of marital union as a public good: “Christian marriage is an institution ordained of God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, established and sanctified for the happiness and welfare of mankind, into which spiritual and physical union one man and one woman enter, cherishing a mutual esteem and love, bearing with each other’s infirmities and weaknesses, comforting each other in trouble, providing in honesty and industry for each other and for their household, praying for each other, and living together the length of their days as heirs to the grace of life” (6.131).

Notably absent from this ringing chorus are injunctions of procreation. The good of marriage is not tied directly to the rearing of children. Its underlying purpose is neither to propagate the species, nor to establish a seal of sexual union. In this sense, Westminster de-mystifies both sexual intercourse and the raising of children, anchoring both in the public goods of happiness and human welfare. Sexual union and children are the fruits of that wider good rather than their source. They are gifts that may occur in the context of a marriage. Indispensable gifts, however, they are not. In our age that glorifies sex as a means of spiritual union and overburdens children as means of parental happiness, this Reformed emphasis is a decidedly counter-cultural strain.

Contemporary Reformed theology has extended Westminster’s emphasis on the public good, intimating the healing of brokenness and heralding the relationship that God establishes with creation. Shirley Guthrie suggests an analogy, where marriage is “a partnership that reflects the covenant relationship between God and the people of God.” Glimpsed in this light, the covenant of marriage extends not only to the couple, but to the entire community of faith. As Guthrie writes, “Marriage is never a purely private relationship between two individuals... [It] is thus a social and communal matter...and a wedding is the public recognition, acceptance, and commitment to this fact.” A Christian marriage attests to neither the private choice of one couple, nor the apotheosis of courtly love. Rather, a marriage expresses public claims of God’s covenantal love, witnessed in mutual human love.

A Christian marriage, then, is an anticipatory event, offering a foretaste of the heavenly banquet and assurance of our present participation in Christ’s covenant with the world. A prayer from the Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship* expresses this hope for marriage, not only for the church, but for all creation: “Make their life together a sign of Christ’s love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair.”

Interpreting Our Heritage Today

The biblical authors and Reformed heritage both assume that a marriage covenant is between a man and a woman. The question of same-sex marriage simply does not enter their interpretive world. Since the church must continually re-interpret its heritage in light of new questions in the attempt to be faithful to the Good News of Jesus Christ, Presbyterians are warranted in asking whether or not the distinctive strands of our tradition would allow for or prohibit same-sex unions or marriages. The burden for either side, in my opinion, lies in whether proposals for same-sex unions meet the theological criteria for marriages outlined in our tradition: May such unions, as Westminster stresses, serve the common good? Are they dim reflections of God’s covenant with humanity, as the Old Testament suggests? Do they direct human persons to one another and to the ultimacy of God’s Reign as the New Testament upholds? Do they, as Calvin urged, model restraint from sin *and* joy in companionship? Do they, however imperfectly, anticipate God’s communion with all creation in Christ, as our liturgy celebrates?

If the church refuses to entertain these questions, then we fall under the judgment outlined in the Confession of 1967: “The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by man when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time” (9.47). Marriage, in the Reformed tradition, stresses covenant, God’s desire for communion with all persons, mutual restraint and joy, the response of God’s people, and the public good. Whenever we debate same-sex marriage, those themes – not sex, procreation, and gender roles – demand our greatest attention.

David H. Jensen is Professor of Constructive Theology at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. His most recent book is *The Lord and Giver of Life: Perspectives on Constructive Pneumatology*. He is a member of University Presbyterian Church in Austin.

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Toward a Church as Generous and Just as God's Grace

A Letter from our Co-Moderators: *Spring 2010*



We invite you to our neck of the woods this summer! The 219th General Assembly meets from July 3-10 in Minneapolis. David is a member of the host presbytery, Twin Cities Area, and Deborah's six hours down the road in Milwaukee. So – seriously – consider planning a vacation to beautiful Minnesota and Wisconsin and including time to visit the Presbyterian family. The Covenant Network staff, the co-moderators and members of the board, and other friends will be there for all or part of the week.



Come and join us as we worship and work together, as we witness to our vision of the church, expand our understandings of its life and ministry, and deepen our relationships. Come for the weekend: Doug Nave is speaking at our annual pre-convening dinner for commissioners and friends, and you will be inspired and edified by his commitment to legal advocacy for LGBT Presbyterians. Stay through lunch on Monday to hear Gustav Niebuhr's address on going beyond tolerance to building bridges and networks that deliberately cross boundaries. His book *Beyond Tolerance* (a must read!) includes an experience at a PC(USA) General Assembly, where he observed the diversity and interaction of groups in the exhibit hall. And that Sunday is the Fourth of July and we can all enjoy the fireworks together – the ones in the sky and not in the assembly!

The Stated Clerk's welcome message on the new G.A. website invites us to come and experience the Lord's Supper together. That's the center of our life in Christ – gathering from all directions and orientations at the Table, giving thanks for what God has done and is doing in our midst, affirming that our brokenness is forgiven and reconciled in Christ, communing with God and one another, being sent into the world to live there as we live together at the Table.

Church happens at tables, with friends and family and others. That's the most important thing that happens at any assembly of Christians. It's not just another meeting. It's communion.

Grace and peace,

Deborah A. Block
Pastor, Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Milwaukee, WI

David A. Van Dyke
Pastor, House of Hope Presbyterian Church, St. Paul, MN